

## **PROPOSAL 113**

### **5 AAC 33.331. Gillnet specifications and operations.**

Change the maximum mesh size during periods established by emergency order from 6 inches to a range of five and one-quarter to 6 inches and define dates in Districts 6, 8 and 11 when the mesh size will be implemented, as follows:

5 AAC 33.331. Gillnet specifications and operations

(d) In Districts 6, 8, 11, and 15, through the fourth Saturday in July, the commissioner may by emergency order, establish fishing periods during which the maximum gillnet mesh size is **5.25 inches - 6 inches** [SIX INCHES].

**(1) For districts 6 and 8, up to July 1st , when the projected terminal run size forecast for Stikine River large Chinook does not allow for a direct Chinook fishery to transpire.**

**(2) For district 11 up to July 1st, when the projected terminal run size forecast for the Taku River large Chinook does not allow for a direct Chinook fishery to transpire.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The Stikine and Taku Chinook runs are not doing well. It has been qualified by the department that the problem is not over fishing, but the fact remains that these runs would be in better shape to endure the current crises had there been more spawners in the river. This proposal's intent is to ensure that the Stikine and Taku Chinook runs are given the best chance for recovery as can be given. The department has in the past, managed the driftnet sockeye opening in June conservatively, with a 6 inch mesh restriction only if the predicted Chinook terminal run of either river was below the midpoint and near the lower end of the escapement goal range. Often when the predicted terminal run was above the midpoint but below what was necessary to allow a directed Chinook fishery to occur, no mesh restriction was applied. This has happened in the Stikine regional management area in the years 2013 thru 2016. By default, not requiring a mesh restriction during what the driftnet management plan specifies as a sockeye fishery, is in fact allowing a direct Chinook fishery to occur. There is new terminology adopted in the 2019 Transboundary Annex of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, defining when a direct fishery can occur. However, this new language does not change the fact, that if a direct fishery is not called for a king net could be allowed in the June sockeye fishery. The direct fisheries for Chinook only occur in districts 8 and 11, yet district 8 is semi-surrounded by district 6 and Stikine Chinook will be intercepted there on their way to the river drainage in the June sockeye fishery. I included district 6 in this proposal because of that and also the impacts of this proposal on the driftnet sockeye fishery. From the 2019 driftnet management plan concerning district 6 and 8 pg 11 below.

“Sockeye salmon fishing in both districts will be managed in accordance with the TBR Annex of the PST. The Annex allows District 6 to be managed primarily for local Alaska sockeye salmon stocks. Management of District 8 is based on the harvest of sockeye salmon of Stikine River origin,” and “During the first few weeks of the sockeye salmon fishery, any extended fishing time or midweek openings will be based on the preseason forecasts, harvest, expected harvest levels, and stock proportion data.”

If the sockeye fishery's performance data is used to determine the potential terminal runs of sockeye to these Transboundary rivers and other local systems, allowing a net mesh that enables

the target species to swim thru it, defeats that purpose. In district 6 and 8 king nets have been used during the June sockeye fishery when no mesh restrictions were required. This practice is potentially costly to the gillnet fleet since the sockeye run could be underestimated, thus leading to less fishing periods.

There is a base level catch (BLC) of Transboundary river kings allowed for each country to procure other fisheries when a direct king salmon fishery is not warranted. Pg.23 of the 2019 Transboundary agreement below.

“(Q) When the terminal run is insufficient to provide for the Parties’ Stikine River Chinook salmon BLC and the lower end of the escapement goal range, the reductions in each Party’s base level fisheries, i.e. the fisheries that contributed to the BLCs, shall be proportional to the Stikine BLC shares.”

The term base level fisheries could only be fisheries that incidentally harvest Transboundary river king salmon. Because if it wasn’t incidental, it would have to be intentional or direct. So, for Alaska to allow a king net during a sockeye fishery would in fact be targeting the base level catch of Chinook and a direct fishery, when the purpose of the BLC is really for incidental harvest.

Allowing a king net during the June sockeye fisheries could also be to target Anita bay and other Alaska hatchery king salmon. Yet there is no management plan for the driftnet fleet to target hatchery king salmon outside of the terminal areas and I seriously doubt the Board of Fisheries would approve one, given that the driftnet fleet has been consistently 13-15% over their hatchery allocation. In fact, the current practice of allowing king nets in the June sockeye fishery, defiantly contributes to the driftnet overage as it is.

I have left the actual mesh size of this proposal to be determined by the Board of Fisheries if they choose to adopt it. Why? Because I do not understand the current department policy when it comes to a mesh restriction, six inches is the choice.

The department has done a study on gillnet mesh size effectiveness, “Catch Efficiency Comparisons Of Four Commercial Gillnet Mesh Sizes In The Taking Of Sockeye And Chum Salmon In Districts 111 And 115, Southeast Alaska.” From that study (pg 4 and I paraphrase): In District 111, the 6" mesh caught the fewest sockeye over the study period (2.6 fish/hour), The 5 1/4" mesh was significantly more effective in catching sockeye salmon than the 5 3/4, 6", and 6 1/4" mesh sizes, and the 5 3/4" was significantly more effective than the 6" or 6 1/4" mesh.

When the target species is sockeye, it makes little sense, if the above study is referenced for the department traditionally to implement a 6 inch mesh restriction. So, I let the Board of Fisheries decide and maybe some new information will become evident and help them with the decision.

Finally, I have limited the time frame in which this mesh restriction would apply because both the Taku and Stikine Chinook runs are 100% in river by the first part of July. Imposing a mesh restriction beyond that time would be an unnecessary burden on the gillnet fleet and deprive them of opportunity to harvest wild and hatchery chum and Chinook salmon. Yet, not continuing the restriction until the fourth Saturday in July, still may affect the data used for the sockeye fishery.

**PROPOSED BY:** Steve Merritt

(HQ-F20-115)

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